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SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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***Foreign Study  
for  
Juniors***

*FOREIGN STUDY FOR JUNIORS*

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## INTRODUCTION

An opportunity to observe and examine the Sweet Briar Junior Year in France in action was the principal purpose of Dean Catherine Sims' trip to Europe during a five-week period in November and December, 1965. She also visited and studied several other programs organized for American undergraduate students, in some of which Sweet Briar juniors are currently enrolled.

Dean Sims, who began her new duties as Dean of Sweet Briar College last summer, is well-equipped to evaluate such programs. As a young graduate student in Columbia University, shortly after completing her bachelor's degree at Barnard College, she studied for a year at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London. More recently, she spent three years in Istanbul, 1960-63, as vice president and dean of the American College for Girls. In addition, she has long been a college teacher of history, having taught for two years at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina and then for some twenty years at Agnes Scott College.

As a newcomer to Sweet Briar College, as one who is thoroughly familiar with collegiate education, and with her background of foreign experience, Dean Sims has been able to present an objective evaluation of the various programs she studied. This is

true, in particular, of the Sweet Briar Junior Year in France, which has been administered by the college since 1948 as a continuation of the pioneer Foreign Study Program begun by the University of Delaware in 1923.

At the present time, 110 young men and women are enrolled in the Sweet Briar program in France, bringing to 1,619 the number of students from nearly two hundred American colleges and universities who have participated in this opportunity for a year of foreign study.

The following account is based on excerpts from Dean Sims' report of her recent trip. It is published to help guide students and their parents or faculty advisors concerning undergraduate study abroad.

## PARIS

On arrival in Paris, where I spent two weeks, I was greeted by Dr. Walter Secor, Professor-in-charge of the 1965-66 Sweet Briar Junior Year in France, and Dr. Janet Letts, his assistant. Dr. Secor, who served in the same capacity seven years ago, is on leave from Denison University, and Dr. Letts is on leave from Wheaton College.

They not only gave me every facility for studying the Sweet Briar program and bore with admirable patience innumerable questions, but helped to arrange interviews with the directors of other programs. Mr. Secor arranged a small reception at Reid Hall, headquarters for the Sweet Briar program and several others, at which I met some of the teachers of the Sweet Briar Junior Year special courses.

As one who has known Reid Hall since her own student days, I was curious to see how it would work out as a center for the Junior Year. The building, now owned and operated by Columbia University, is in excellent condition. The heating system is more than adequate; Mr. Secor and Miss Letts have comfortable offices, and in the secretary's office there is plenty of work space as well as room for bulletin boards and a students' mail center. I had thought that the students might congregate there, but differences in schedules and the fact that their living accommodations are dispersed over Paris evidently work against any large number being at Reid Hall at the same time.

The dining room offers excellent food at reasonable prices. Students may get sandwiches and drinks, or a set meal. I did not have dinner there but was told by both students and staff that the dinners are superior, better than can be found in even a simple restaurant for the price. I ate lunch there several times, and found both quality and quantity more than satisfactory.

I saw all the classrooms, the library and the browsing room, and the students' salon. Space seems to be adequate; the lighting in the classrooms, the blackboards, and the student chairs are satisfactory. It is possible to get from one part of the building to another without going outside, an advantage in view of the weather, but I noticed that the open courtyard was generally used as a passageway and, on the one clear day, as a gathering place.

Satisfaction with Reid Hall was expressed by all the American directors with whom I talked. A number of them had worked previously in other locations and Reid Hall compares more than favorably, in their estimation.

I attended a few courses, including M. Simon's course on the Theater and M. Monod's course on French Literature of the Twentieth Century. M. Simon is an interesting lecturer. The students were obviously enjoying him. He meets with them twice a week for an hour and a half each time; one meeting is devoted to a *critique* of the play which the group has seen that week; the other is for more general discussion of the contemporary theater. I stayed through

the lecture on one occasion and can understand why the students speak so warmly of M. Simon. His lectures are digressive, to be sure, but the digressions are interesting and informative.

I attended a class conducted by M. Monod in which the subject for discussion was Mauriac's *Le Noeud des Vipères*.

The lecture was admirably organized and presented — just enough information about Mauriac, references to his other works, some comments on his contemporaries, followed by a careful analysis of the text. M. Monod spoke about fifty minutes. Then for forty minutes he asked questions and had some of the students read selected passages. He showed a real talent for handling students, correcting them explicitly but gently so that they did not retreat into silence. He seems genuinely interested in the students and the program, and pleased to have a teaching experience which he is not likely to have within the French university system. M. Monod's class was in fact a model.

I feel that the strength of the Sweet Briar program lies partly in the combination of the regular university courses, where they are available and suitable, and the special courses. Our special courses are good, and clearly we must have some, but I hope we shall not go over to them entirely. If we select good students with an adequate knowledge of French, there is no reason why they cannot be enrolled in some courses at the Sorbonne, the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques*, the Louvre, or some other institute. We must normally be prepared to provide

tutors for the university courses, though Mr. Secor told me that he has a few exceptionally well-qualified students who are able to work without a tutor. One at least is taking no special courses at all; at the other extreme are a few who are taking mainly special courses.

Observation, conversations with Mr. Secor and the other directors whom I saw, and careful questioning of our own Sweet Briar students and others whom I met, have strengthened my conviction that we must maintain high standards for admission to the program. Our effort should be to accept only those who are intellectually able, well prepared in French, and strongly motivated. Major studies most suitable for the Junior Year in France are the French language and literature, government, history, and history of art.

Junior Year in France is not for the passive students nor is it for the drifters. Only those willing to exert themselves and seek the opportunity to learn more will profit from foreign study. High standards will maintain our good reputation in French university circles and help us to find and keep good tutors and lecturers, in spite of the competition offered by the newer groups.

I visited two of the hostesses who receive our students: Mme. Castelli and Mme. Rivière. Both are charming women and their apartments are comfortable and well furnished. Neither knows any English to speak of, and I feel sure that the students do in fact



speaking French in the home and that these ladies give them good care.

Housing is nonetheless a great problem for all the American-sponsored programs. The housing shortage in Paris grows greater, not less, as the number of students seeking housing increases. For a student to find suitable housing on her own is a formidable task. Thus one of the real contributions our program makes is in this non-academic but important area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

I should like to offer the following specific recommendations for the Sweet Briar College Junior Year in France:

1. In accepting applicants, give preference to those in French, history, government, and art, and accept those in other fields only on an individual basis if they demonstrate real strength in French and are well along in their major fields.
2. Set a B general average as the desirable minimum and be sure that the applicant has not only good grades in his courses in French but has had the equivalent of a survey of French literature and a course in composition. All the directors with whom I talked, not only in France but elsewhere, emphasized that many, if not most, American students are weak in composition.

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In Paris I also talked with Dr. Blanchard Rideout, who twice acted as Professor-in-charge of the Sweet Briar

Junior Year in France and is now director of the Middlebury College Graduate School of French in Paris, and with Miss Patricia Weed, the director of the Smith College junior year program, who was assistant to the Professor-in-charge on the Sweet Briar staff in 1961-62. Smith College accepts less than forty, including a few students from other colleges, and all members of the group are regularly enrolled in special courses arranged by Smith, although they are urged to attend lectures elsewhere.

## MUNICH

From Paris I traveled to Munich, where I met one of our students who is enrolled in the Wayne State University group. She lives in a Catholic Students' Hostel, where the students help with the housework, and she likes it very well. In discussing her preparation for study in Munich, she admitted that she needed more work in composition. My impression is that we, and probably all other colleges, need to lay more stress on composition in all our modern language courses.

I was graciously welcomed by Dr. Marianne Riegler, resident director for Wayne, a position which she has held for twelve years. She is a German who has had some of her education in the United States and knows our educational system well.

The group has sixty-five members this year. About a third are majors in

German, the others are in history, government, art, and philosophy. Dr. Riegler would discourage majors in mathematics and the natural sciences.

All the students take some regular courses at the University of Munich. A tutor, recommended by the professor, is invariably provided and the tutor gives and grades mid-semester and final examinations as well as provides guidance as to reading, in weekly sessions. Wayne provides some special courses, each of which meets three times a week for an hour at a time. Tests, papers, and examinations are required. Grading is under Dr. Riegler's supervision and is on the American scale.

The housing and financial arrangements are worth commenting on. Wayne makes all the arrangements as to housing, collecting in advance from each student an inclusive fee for the year. This is then paid back monthly to the student, who pays directly for his housing and board. Any balance is for spending money. Dr. Riegler says that very few students are housed with families because the housing shortage in Munich is acute. Wayne has been allotted forty-five spaces in student hostels which are comfortable and cheap. More spaces are not available to Wayne, and some may be withdrawn, since the hostels were built for German students.

The Wayne program seems to be soundly conceived and well administered.

## FLORENCE

Florence, and the Syracuse Semester in Italy, was another stop on my trip. One Sweet Briar junior is enrolled for the entire year, since different courses are being offered in the two terms.

Now in its seventh year, the Syracuse program is limited to fifty-six students a semester, most of them juniors. Of the forty-six enrolled in the first half-year, about three-fifths were from Syracuse. Students attend only special courses. As there is no language prerequisite, all are required to study Italian, which is taught by local instructors.

The program is not designed for language majors and would not be especially suitable for them. The director, Mr. Harold Vaughn, said Syracuse intends it primarily for those majoring in history, government, and history of art.

Students are housed entirely with families, only one to a family, and they change housing in mid-semester. They eat all meals with the family, are expected to study at home, and to conform to family customs and rules.

The Syracuse program is well-administered by serious people who wish to uphold high academic standards. Their philosophy of foreign study contemplates the transference of the home campus, its teachers and students as well as methods and standards, abroad. One can respect the philosophy without accepting it.

My opinion is that a knowledge of the language of the host country is the first prerequisite for the understanding and appreciation of the culture thereof. How can any young student grow intellectually and personally by the experience of foreign study if insulated from the foreign culture by initial ignorance of the local language? And is not some association with the foreign educational system a *sine qua non*, even if material could be covered more efficiently by American teachers giving American-style courses?

## MADRID

In Madrid, I talked with the three Sweet Briar juniors studying there this year, two with New York University and one with Mary Baldwin College.

From Miss Barbara Ely, director for Mary Baldwin, I learned that the group numbers seventeen girls, most of whom are from Mary Baldwin. The program is designed primarily for those majoring in Spanish, and all classes are taught in that language. Students live in Spanish homes, usually one per family.

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A much larger program, now in its eighth year, is that operated by New York University. It is designed for majors in Spanish but those in history or history of art can possibly be provided for. As under the Mary Baldwin plan, students carry five courses; they are given by teachers from the University of Madrid's

Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. Classes are held in the building of this Faculty at the *Ciudad Universitaria*, and there is a regular schedule of tests, papers, reports, and examinations. The plan is to make these special courses the equivalent of courses offered in New York.

This is by far the largest program I visited, with an enrollment of 216, of whom 64 are graduate students. Most of the rest are juniors, and only a small percentage come from New York University. The majority live in Spanish families, others in student hostels.

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The Smith College Junior Year in Madrid is located at the International Institute for Girls, where Mary Baldwin is also situated. Established about thirty years ago, the Smith program has eighteen students this year, most of whom are from Smith College. A preliminary session of several weeks is held in Barcelona, where the students live in a hostel. In Madrid they live with families, usually one or two to a family.

From the director, Señor Juan Ortega, who was born in Spain but is now an American citizen and is on the staff of Smith College, I learned that all students take the same special courses, provided by Smith. He added that a number of the teachers have been with this program for years and understand and follow the American system of written work and grading.

## LONDON

My visits in London, just as the Christmas vacation was beginning, were limited to Bedford and Westfield Colleges, and the London School of Economics. In the absence of organized junior year programs we must rely, as we have in the past, on assisting well-qualified students to secure individual placement in one of the colleges within the University of London.

The London School of Economics offers a specialized curriculum which we should not encourage our students to apply for unless they are exceptionally strong and have had several substantial courses in the prospective major field, of which government or economics would be the most suitable. Most American undergraduates are not ready for this school.

One Sweet Briar junior, who is majoring in history, is at Westfield College this year. She is clearly gaining from the year both academically and in other ways. She lives and takes her meals in the College, which has an enrollment this year of 620 students, about one-sixth of whom are men.

Our junior is following the regular program of studies and is under special direction of Miss May McKisack, Senior Tutor in History and Acting Principal of the College. She takes two history courses, each consisting of a lecture and a tutorial session. She writes one essay every other week for each course, working from a long bibliography and selecting her topic in consultation with the lecturer. Each essay is carefully read, corrected, and then discussed in a tutorial conference.

In addition, she attends a lecture course in Shakespeare at Westfield, one in art of the Italian Renaissance at the Courtauld Institute, and a lecture series at the University of London on modern European history. For these there are no tutorials. She will "sit" the regular examination in English history in April but a special examination will be given for her in medieval history in June, since the regular one will not be given until September.

I was most cordially received at Westfield by the Registrar, Miss Sims, and her assistant, Miss Wheeler. They told me that they will try to hold four places a year for "occasional" students in their third year of college study. They want stable and conscientious students who have gone far enough in one subject or area to be able to profit by the program. They find that those majoring in English or history are most satisfactory; those in mathematics and the sciences least satisfactory. Westfield does not offer enough in philosophy, psychology, or sociology to be willing to accept occasional students in those subjects.

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At Bedford College I talked with the Registrar, Miss Hodgson. She knows Sweet Briar and has been favorably impressed by some of our students who have studied at Bedford. Miss Hodgson made it clear that applicants should be able and well prepared in the field they wish to study.

Unfortunately, Bedford cannot accept students in English because of the large number of their own in that field. The History Department is always willing to consider an applicant and the head of the



Sociology Department likes to have a few occasional students. Bedford would be reluctant to accept any in mathematics and would consider a science student very carefully before accepting her. Assuming a satisfactory general record and references, the decision as to acceptance or rejection would lie with the individual department there.

Bedford does not have room to house all its students but tries to accommodate an American occasional student in one of the college halls of residence.

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Unfortunately, I was not able to visit the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, with which Sweet Briar has had a highly satisfactory connection for more than thirty years and, since 1950, an even more beneficial exchange program. Our two students there have written enthusiastically of their experiences and the St. Andrews student who is at Sweet Briar this year is an excellent representative of this university, one of the oldest in Europe. We are fortunate that St. Andrews has been willing for so many years to accept two juniors on our recommendation.

## CONCLUSION

The academic and personal enrichment which our students enjoy as a result of a period of study abroad is obvious to anyone who has had much experience with college students. Foreign study in the junior year, however, is not to be recommended for everyone. It is for better-than-average students who are interested in their studies, have good

physical and mental health, and can adjust successfully to a new environment.

Nor is foreign study without competent supervision likely to be of great value. Good and experienced administration is required to provide instruction, to fit students from different backgrounds successfully into a foreign educational system, to pay adequate attention to the housing and health of the students. Only a stable program under the sponsorship of a reputable American institution can, year in and year out, be depended upon.

For this reason, Sweet Briar's policy has been and will be to give its approval to study abroad in the junior year only when students are accepted by a recognized and fully accredited program under the auspices of a college or university which we can rely upon to maintain high standards.

I hope on some other occasion to visit summer study programs which are available in such places as Dijon, Avignon, Madrid, Vienna, and Salzburg, and the excellent and well-established summer schools of the British universities held annually at London, Oxford, Stratford, and Edinburgh. For those who are not especially suited for or interested in a full year of study abroad, a good summer school may provide an eminently successful combination of study and travel and afford some opportunity to make an acquaintance with a foreign culture.

Study abroad opens doors to the wide world outside our homeland. Our students return with a better understanding of our own way of life because they have come to know another.



